HOSEA 4

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
God's Controversy with Israel	God's Charge Against Israel	All Israel has forgotten the Lord and has sought help from other gods and other nations (4:1-8:14)	The Lord's Accusation Against Israel	General Corruption
4:1-3 (1-3)	4:1-10 (1a-b)	4:1-3 (1-3)	4:1-3	4:1-3 (1-3)
	(1c-3)		The Lord Accuses the Priests	Against the Priests
4:4-6 (4-6)	(4-6)	4:4-6 (4-6)	4:4-6	4:4-6 (4-6)
4:7-10 (7-10)	(7-10)	4:7-14 (7-11a)	4:7-10	4:7-11a (7-11a)
	The Idolatry of Israel		The Lord Condemns Pagan Worship	Worship in Israel is Idolatrous and Debauched
4:11-14 (11-14)	4:11-14 (11-13)	(11b-14)	4:11-13a	4:11b-14 (11b-14)
	(14)		4:13b-14	A Warning to Judah and Israel
4:15-19 (15-19)	4:15-19 (15)	4:15-19 (15-16)	4:15-19	4:15-19 (15-19)
	(16)			
	(17-19)	(17-19)		

READING CYCLE THREE (see "Bible Interpretation Seminar")
FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects (reading cycle #3). Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

BASIC OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS 4-11

A. Hosea 4-5 comprise a literary unit that describes Israel's faithlessness.

B. Hosea 6-10 are a literary unit that describes Israel's punishment.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HOSEA 4:1-3

[1]Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel,
For the LORD has a case against the inhabitants of the land,
Because there is no faithfulness or kindness
Or knowledge of God in the land.
[2]*There is* swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery.
They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed.
[3]Therefore the land mourns,
And everyone who lives in it languishes
Along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky,
And also the fish of the sea disappear.

4:1

NASB	**"Listen to the word of the LORD"**
NKJV, NRSV, REB, JPSOA, Peshitta	**"Hear the word of the LORD"**
TEV	**"Listen to what he says"**
NJB	**"Hear what Yahweh says"**

The VERB (BDB 1033, KB 1570, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) means to hear so as to perform. It is used several times in Hosea (cf. Hos. 4:1; 5:1; 9:17), but many times in the other eighth century prophets.

1. Amos, 3:1,13; 4:1; 5:1; 7:16; 8:4,11
2. Micah, 1:2; 3:1,9; 5:15; 6:1[twice],2,9; 7:7

See note at Amos 3:1.

▣ **"the LORD has a case"** This term (BDB 936) has two main senses.

1. a legal lawsuit, Isa. 1:23; 41:21; Jer. 2:9; 25:31; 50:34; Hos. 4:1; 12:3; Micah 6:2; 7:9
2. a dispute or controversy, Isa. 41:11; 58:4; Jer. 15:10; Hosea 2:2

YHWH is victim, prosecuting attorney, and judge! The court case is one of three common literary techniques used by the prophets.

1. legal case (i.e., divorce case)
2. funeral dirge (judgment oracle)
3. salvation promise (deliverance oracle)

▣ **"against the inhabitants of the land"** The land of Palestine/Canaan had a special theological significance. This starts with God's promise to Abraham to give him a seed, a name, and a land (cf. Gen. 12:1-1). This promise is reaffirmed in a special "covenant trance" in Gen. 15:12-21. The land will be cleansed of Canaanite fertility worship (cf. Hos. 4:16). When the people of God become involved in the same abominations they, too, must be cleansed from YHWH's land!

SPECIAL TOPIC: COVENANT PROMISES TO THE PATRIARCHS

▣

NASB, NRSV, TEV	**"faithfulness"**
NKJV	**"truth"**
NJB	**"loyalty"**
JPSOA	**"honesty"**
REB	**"good faith"**
LXX	**"truthfulness"**
Peshitta	**"justice"**

See note at 10:2 and also the SPECIAL TOPIC: BELIEVE, TRUST, FAITH and FAITHFULNESS IN THE OT.

▣

NASB	**"kindness"**
NKJV, LXX, Peshitta	**"mercy"**
NRSV, REB	**"loyalty"**
TEV	**"love"**
NJB	**"faith"**
JPSOA	**"goodness"**

This is the Hebrew word *hesed* (BDB 338, cf. Hos. 6:4).

SPECIAL TOPIC: LOVINGKINDNESS (*Hesed*)

▣ **"knowledge"** This is the theme (e.g., Hos. 2:20; 4:6; 5:4; 6:6,6) of the book—that we should know God not as an object (an "it," an idol), but in a personal, intimate relationship (a person). The term "know" (BDB 395) in the OT is related to a personal, intimate relationship (cf. Gen. 2:20; 4:1; Jer. 1:5). The marvelous part of this truth is that not only can sinful humans know God, but that they are known by Him (cf. Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:1ff). He seeks us!

SPECIAL TOPIC: KNOW

4:2 Instead of faithfulness, kindness, and knowledge, Israel was depicted by the terms mentioned in Hos. 4:2 (all INFINITIVE ABSOLUTES), which refer to the breaking of the Ten Commandments (i.e., specifically the 2nd, 6th, 7th, and 8th). The Ten Commandments are God's will for mankind in society. They are not given to restrict mankind's freedom, but to accentuate his communal happiness! But Israel knowingly broke all moral boundaries (BDB 829, KB 971, *Qal* PERFECT)!

4:3 "everyone who lives in it languishes" The term (BDB 51, KB 63, *pulal* PERFECT with *waw*) means to become weak and by connotation weak by drought (e.g., Joel 1:10; Isa. 16:8; 24:4; 33:9; Jer. 12:4). The fire (i.e., drought) of God's Deuteronomic judgments (cf. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28) has come (cf. Amos 7:4).

1. the land mourns
2. the people languish
3. the animals disappear

Physical creation (especially YHWH's Promised Land) was affected by mankind's sin (cf. Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 8:18-25). This passage is a divine judgment even more severe than the flood (cf. Gen. 6-9) because even the fish are affected (cf. Zeph. 1:2-3). Ironically judgment from too much water (Genesis 6) is now judgment from not enough water (i.e., drought)! Chaos has returned!

SPECIAL TOPIC: WATERS

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HOSEA 4:4-6

4Yet let no one find fault, and let none offer reproof;
For your people are like those who contend with the priest.
5So you will stumble by day,
And the prophet also will stumble with you by night;
And I will destroy your mother.
6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you from being My priest.
Since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children.

4:4-5:7 This literary unit deals with the sins of the priests!

4:4 The first two VERBS are JUSSIVES:
1. let no one find fault, *Qal* JUSSIVE
2. let none offer reproof, *Hiphil* JUSSIVE

These both have legal connotations (e.g., #1 Jdg. 6:31-32; #2 Amos 5:10). But who is the speaker in 4a?
1. an unnamed objector (cf. Amos 5:10)
2. a priestly representative (i.e., High Priest)
3. the nation of Israel (represented by priest and prophet)
4. YHWH Himself (the Judge speaks, cf. Hos. 4:5c)

▣

NASB, NKJV	**"For you people are like those who contend with the priest"**
NRSV, NET	**"For with you is my contention, O priest"**
TEV. REB	**"my complaint is against you priests"**
NJB	**"it is you, priest, that I denounce"**
JPSOA	**"for this your people has a grievance against [you], O priest"**

The NASB does not fit the context well. A different revocalization and a doubling of one consonant can result in "My contention is against you, O Priests" (RSV; see good note in NET Bible, p. 1562, #15), which fits the context (cf. Hos. 4:6) better.

The UBS Text Project, p. 231, supports the MT reading with a "B" rating (some doubt) with the suggested translation:

"and your people (are) like (people) contending against the priest"

4:5 The VERB "stumble" (BDB 505, KB 502, *Qal* PERFECT with *waw*) is repeated twice. To stumble is the opposite metaphor of "faithfulness" (i.e., sure footedness).

▣

NASB, NKJV, NRSV	**"And I will destroy your mother"**
TEV	**"and I am going to destroy Israel, your mother"**
NJB	**"and I will make your mother perish"**
JPSOA	**"And I will destroy your kindred"**
REB	**"your nation is brought to ruin"**
LXX	**"I have made your mother like night"**

The NET Bible (p. 1562) suggests an emendation (two consonant changes). "You have destroyed your own people." This then would not be a quote from YHWH, but the first in a series of condemnations of the priests. Priests are condemned

1. for not teaching the truth of God's covenant
2. for living lives of corrupted fertility practices

4:6 "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

Because you have rejected knowledge" The term "destroy" (BDB 198, KB 225, *Niphal* PERFECT) means "to cut off" and thereby to cease to exist. The people were guilty, not because they did not understand, but because they knowingly turned away and refused (BDB 549, KB 540, *Qal* PERFECT) to obey God. This was especially true of the religious and political leaders.

▣ **"I also will reject you from being My priest"** The nation of Israel was meant to be priests to all the world (cf. Exod. 19:4-6). Here, however, it refers to the priests who were to instruct the people in the law of God (cf. Lev. 10:11; Deut. 17:10-11; 33:10; Jer. 18:18; Mal. 2:6-7), which they did not!

▣ **"Since you have forgotten the law of your God"** Knowledge has two aspects:

1. personal relationship
2. covenant obligations

They forgot (BDB 1013, KB 1489, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*) YHWH and His covenant so He will forget (*Qal* IMPERFECT) their descendants. This is a reversal of the covenant promises of Exod. 20:6 and Deut. 5:10; 7:9! Priests (and Levites) were to be the teachers of Israel, but they became the corruptors of Israel! They could no longer serve as sacrificial offerers!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HOSEA 4:7-10

7The more they multiplied, the more they sinned against Me;
I will change their glory into shame.
8They feed on the sin of My people
And direct their desire toward their iniquity.
9And it will be, like people, like priest;
So I will punish them for their ways
And repay them for their deeds.
10They will eat, but not have enough;
They will play the harlot, but not increase,
Because they have stopped giving heed to the LORD.

4:7 "The more they multiplied, the more they sinned against Me" "They" seems to refer to the people who were bringing sacrifices to the priests who performed cultic activities (cf. Hos. 4:8-10). The more God gave His people, the more they turned away from Him (see a similar example using the prophets in Hos. 11:2).

▣

NASB, NKJV, LXX	**"I will change their glory into shame"**
NKJV, Peshitta	**"they changed their glory into shame"**
TEV	**"I will turn your honor into disgrace"**
NJB	**"they have bartered their Glory for Shame"**
JPSOA	**"I will change their dignity to dishonor"**

As you can see from the translations the textual issue is over who the subject is, YHWH (NASB, TEV) or Israel (NRSV, NJB). The MT has YHWH as the subject (BDB 558, KB 560, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT). However, Jewish tradition changes the VERB to a *Hiphil* PERFECT. This emendation is followed by the Jewish Targums (Aramaic translation and commentaries) and the Peshitta (Syrian Christian translation).

The term "shame" (BDB 885) is the opposite of "honor" (cf. Ps. 83:16; Prov. 3:35; 13:18). In this context it refers to idolatry (cf. Hos. 4:18). They shared God's glory as His covenant people, but they exchanged this for self-centered sexual fertility worship (the glory of Ba'al).

SPECIAL TOPIC: SHAME

4:8 "They feed on the sin of My people,
And direct their desire toward their iniquity" This seems to relate to the priests' lusting after the meat of the sin offerings (cf. Lev. 6 : 26), but metaphorically it implies that they joined in the fertility rites.

The phrase "direct their desire toward" is literally "lift one's soul to." It is used six times in this sense (cf. Deut. 24:15; Ps. 24:4; Prov. 19:18; Jer. 22:27; 44:14, and here).

4:9 "like people, like priest" This is a common proverb which reflects an obvious truth as the priests were to be judged for their known sin, so too, the people.

▣ **"I will punish them for their ways"** The VERB (BDB 823, KB 955, *Qal* PERFECT with *waw*) basically means "to visit" or "attend to." YHWH can visit for blessing or judgment, based on the covenant fidelity of the people (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28).

4:10 Though they seek fertility idols, they will not find enough food, nor children (e.g., Hag. 1:6)! The growth in population implied in Hos. 4:7a is now at an end!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HOSEA 4:11-14

11Harlotry, wine and new wine take away the understanding.
12 My people consult their wooden idol, and their *diviner's* wand informs them;
For a spirit of harlotry has led *them* astray,
And they have played the harlot, *departing* from their God.
13They offer sacrifices on the tops of the mountains
And burn incense on the hills,
Under oak, poplar and terebinth,
Because their shade is pleasant.
Therefore your daughters play the harlot
And your brides commit adultery.
14I will not punish your daughters when they play the harlot
Or your brides when they commit adultery,
For *the men* themselves go apart with harlots

And offer sacrifices with temple prostitutes;
So the people without understanding are ruined.

4:11 This is obviously a proverb. Sin robs people of moral sight and they grope in darkness as drunk, blind men" (cf. Isa. 28:1-4).

SPECIAL TOPIC: BIBLICAL ATTITUDES TOWARD ALCOHOL AND ALCOHOL ABUSE

4:12 Israel was seeking to know the future and control it by improper means (cf. Deut. 18:9-13).

▣

NASB	**"wooden idol"**
NKJV	**"wooden *idols*"**
NRSV, TEV, REB	**"a piece of wood"**
NJB	**"a block of wood"**
JPSOA	**"stick"**
LXX	**"rods"**
Peshitta	**"staff"**

This term (BDB 781) means "tree" or "wood." A slightly different form is used in Hos. 4:17; 8:4; 13:2; 14:8 and means "idols." Since this is paralleled with rod/wand/staff it may refer to a tree oracle or a reference to the Asherah pole/carved stake and not a humanoid-shaped wooden idol. The JPSOA footnote suggests it refers to a phallus symbol.

▣

NASB, REB	**"*diviner's* wand"**
NKJV, Peshitta	**"staff"**
NRSV	**"divining rod"**
TEV, NJB	**"stick"**
JPSOA	**"rod"**

This term (BDB 596) means "a tree," "a staff," or "a rod." Some of its uses are:

1. a wooden weapon (cf. 1 Sam. 17:40,43; Ezek. 29:9)
2. a walking stick (cf. Gen. 32:20; Exod. 12:11)
3. a stick to control an animal (cf. Num. 22:27)
4. young trees (e.g., Gen. 30:37-39, 41; Jer. 1:1)
5. a shepherd's staff (cf. Zech. 11:7,10,14, see NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 1088)

SPECIAL TOPIC: DIVINER

▣ **"a spirit of harlotry"** The term "spirit" has nothing to do with demon possession here, but it is used in the OT for "mindset," "character" or "energizing center." Here is a list of how this term is used to express human characteristics or feelings:

1. bitterness of spirit, Gen. 26:35
2. shortness of spirit, Exod. 6:9
3. oppressed in spirit, 1 Sam. 1:15
4. sullen in spirit, 1 Kgs. 21:5
5. impatient in spirit, Job 21:4; Prov. 14:29
6. haughty in spirit vs. humble in spirit, Prov. 16:18-19; Isa. 66:2
7. faithful of spirit, Prov. 11:13
8. staggering in spirit, Isa. 19:14
9. grieved in spirit, Isa. 54:6

This describes Israel's lust after the fertility gods of Canaan (cf. Hos. 5:4). The interpretive issues were these cultic sexual acts (cf. Hos. 4:3-14) or it could be a metaphor of unfaithfulness (e.g., Exod. 34:15-16; Lev. 20:5; Jdg. 2:17; 8:27,33; 1 Chr. 5:25; Ps. 73:27; 106:39).

SPECIAL TOPIC: SPIRIT IN THE BIBLE

▣ **"*departing* from their God"** Literally this is "from under God" (BDB 1065), implying their deserting God's authority.

4:13 "They offer sacrifices. . .burn incense" These could refer to two separate cultic acts or just incense burning. No sacrificial altars are connected to local Ba'al worship.

▣ **"on the top of the mountains. . .on the hills"** This could refer to two things:

1. the highest part of the topography was the site of the local Ba'al altar
2. the altars of Ba'al/Astarte were made of cut stones with a central phallic symbol (raised pillar) and an Asherah carved pole (cf. Deut. 12:2; Jer. 2:20; 3:6; Ezek. 6:13)

▣ **"oak, poplar, and terebinth"** Trees marked sacred sites because they reflected the presence of underground water, which was extremely important for desert people. There is no record of Israel ever worshiping trees, although they held them to be sacred sites (e.g., Gen. 13:18; Jdg. 4:5). In this context the trees were used as shade for the fertility practices of Ba'al (cf. Deut. 12:2; Jer. 2:20; 3:6; 13:27; 17:2; Hos. 4:13).

4:14 It is possible that these statements are really questions expecting a "yes" answer. There is no double standard with God. Both men and women are condemned for their promiscuous fertility rites (cf. Deut. 23:17-18). There are three types of women involved:

1. new brides
2. cultic prostitutes
3. other local women

It is also grammatically and contextually possible to see the priests as the recipients of the cultic acts of Hos. 4:14. The priests who should have known better, also participated in the sexual activities and set a disastrous pattern for the community! If this is accurate, then the women mentioned in Hos. 4:13 may be the priests' own families!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HOSEA 4:15-19

15Though you, Israel, play the harlot,
Do not let Judah become guilty;
Also do not go to Gilgal,
Or go up to Beth-aven
And take the oath:
"As the LORD lives!"
16Since Israel is stubborn
Like a stubborn heifer,
Can the LORD now pasture them
Like a lamb in a large field?
17Ephraim is joined to idols;
Let him alone.
18Their liquor gone,
They play the harlot continually;

Their rulers dearly love shame.
[19]The wind wraps them in its wings,
And they will be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

4:15 This verse has a series of JUSSIVES:
1. "Do not let Judah become guilty" (BDB 79, KB 95, *Qal* JUSSIVE)
2. "Do not go to Gilgad" (BDB 97, KB 112, *Qal* JUSSIVE)
3. "Do not go up to Beth-aven" (BDB 748, KB 828, *Qal* JUSSIVE)
4. "Take the oath" (BDB 989, KB 1396, *Niphal* JUSSIVE)

▣ **"Though you, Israel, play the harlot, Do not let Judah become guilty"** This plea is paralleled in Ezekiel 23 (cf. Jer. 3:6-18). Judah should have seen and feared, but she did not! She is even more responsible!

▣ **"Do not go to Gilgal"** This was a possible reference to the site of the first campsite of Joshua when the Israelites entered the Promised Land. It had now become an idolatrous shrine (see notes at Amos 4:4; 5:5). The other possibility is that it refers to a northern Gilgal, which was the location of a school of the prophets (cf. 2 Kgs. 2:1; 4:38), which later became a worship center for Ba'al (cf. Hos. 9:15, 12:11; Amos 5:5, see *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, p. 330).

▣ **"Beth-aven"** This refers to Beth-el (cf. Hos. 4:15; 5:8; 10:5; Amos 5:5), "house of God," which was sarcastically changed to "house of wickedness" (BDB 110). This was one of the two sites of the "golden calf" worship set up by Jeroboam I (cf. 1 Kgs. 12:28-29). Originally the calf represented YHWH (cf. Exod. 32), but quickly became corrupted into a fertility symbol.

▣ **"And take the oath:**
As the LORD lives'" This oath reflects the covenant name for God, YHWH (cf. Exod. 3:14). The negative form Hos. 4:15c is implied in 15d-e.

SPECIAL TOPIC: NAMES FOR DEITY, D.

4:16 "Since Israel is stubborn,
Like a stubborn heifer" The term "stubborn" (BDB 710, KB 770) is used twice comparing Israel with a non-cooperative (i.e., disobedient to authority) plow animal. This is often used of a rebellious spirit:
1. of a son, Deut. 21:18-21
2. of a ruler, Isa. 1:23 (cf. Hos. 9:15)
3. of children, Isa. 30:1
4. of a people, Isa. 65:1-7
5. of God's people, Jer. 6:28

"Stubborn" and "rebellious" often occur together (cf. Deut. 2:18,20; Ps. 78:8; Jer. 5:23).

▣ **"Can the LORD now pasture them"** This can be a statement or an unmarked rhetorical question. Context implies a judgment scene (i.e., exile), not the tender care of a shepherd.

▣ **"Like a lamb in a large field"** Lambs do not like large fields, but small enclosures.

4:17 "Ephraim is joined to idols" Ephraim was the largest tribe in Israel, so it stood for all the Northern Ten Tribes. Their first king, Jeroboam I, was from the tribe of Ephraim. The term "joined" is a strong term for the political (and by implication, religious) union between allies (BDB 287, KB 287, *Qal* PASSIVE PARTICIPLE, cf. Gen. 14:3).

David A. Hubbard, Hosea (The Tyndale OT Commentaries), suggests that the term "joined" should be interpreted in light of its use in magical texts (cf. Deut. 18:11; Ps. 58:5). If so, Israel has

been "charmed" or "under a spell," possibly linked to 4:12; 5:4 (p. 110). My problem with this is not linguistic, but theological. Personified evil should not be used as an excuse for fallen mankind's sin. These people sinned "open-eyed" against the love of their covenant God. Though evil, both natural and personal, is a part of our fallen world, humans are still responsible for their actions (cf. Hos. 4:18c).

▣ **"Let him alone"** What a horrendous judgment (BDB 628, KB 679, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE). God allows His people to have their own desires and choices (and their consequences) because of their spiritual blindness (cf. Hos. 5:4; Rom. 1:24, 26, 28).

4:18 Happy hour is over! The term "rulers" is literally "shield" (BDB 171). It usually refers to political leaders, but here it may include the priests and prophets (cf. Hos. 4:5).

4:19 "The wind wraps them in its wings" The "wings of the wind" are metaphorical for

1. foreign alliances (cf. Hos. 12:1)
2. YHWH's coming judgment (cf. Hos. 13:15, i.e., YHWH used Mesopotamian powers to exile His people, cf. Jer. 22:22)
3. evil spiritual influences (i.e., "wind" translated "spirit," cf. Hos. 4:12; 5:4)

YHWH is depicted as riding on the wings of the wind (cf. 2 Sam. 22:11; Ps. 18:10; 104:3). YHWH's presence can denote covenant safety (under the shaddow of His wings) and protection or as here, covenant justice and the consequences of covenant violations!

SPECIAL TOPIC: SHADOW AS A METAPHOR FOR PROTECTION AND CARE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is David mentioned in the context of northern Israel in chapter 3?
2. Explain the aspects of biblical faith mentioned in Hos. 3:5.
3. Define in your own words the terms: faithfulness, kindness, and knowledge.
4. How does modern man participate in idolatry?

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